EXPRESS MAIL NO.: EV 318425525 US **PATENT**
DATE DEPOSITED: JULY 8, 2003

PREFORMED POT COVER FORMED OF POLYMERIC MATERIALS HAVING A TEXTURE OR APPEARANCE SIMULATING THE TEXTURE OR APPEARANCE OF PAPER

CROSS REFERENCE TO RELATED APPLICATIONS

[0001] This application is a continuation of U.S. Serial No. 09/892,122, filed June 26, 2001; which is a continuation-in-part of US Serial No. 09/153,433, filed September 14, 1998, now abandoned; which is a continuation-in-part of U.S. Serial No. 09/098,898, filed June 17, 1998, now abandoned; which claims benefit under 35 U.S.C. 119(e) of provisional application U.S. Serial No. 60/050,867, filed June 26, 1997; the contents of which are hereby expressly incorporated by reference in their entirety.

STATEMENT REGARDING FEDERALLY SPONSORED RESEARCH OR DEVELOPMENT

[0002] Not applicable.

FIELD OF THE INVENTION

[0003] The present invention relates to polymeric materials having a texture or appearance simulating paper, and more particularly but not by way of limitation, to preformed, shape-sustaining flower pot covers made from such polymeric materials.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

[0004] Fig. 1 is a perspective view of a sheet of polymeric material having a texture or appearance simulating paper constructed in accordance with the present invention, one corner of the sheet of polymeric material upwardly turned.

[0005] Fig. 2 is a perspective view of the sheet of polymeric material having a texture or appearance simulating paper of Fig. 1 having a bonding material disposed along one edge thereof, one corner of the sheet of polymeric material upwardly turned.

[0006] Fig. 3 is a perspective view of the sheet of polymeric material having a texture or appearance simulating paper of Fig. 2 having a floral grouping disposed thereon.

[0007] Fig. 4 is a perspective view of the floral grouping of Fig. 3 being wrapped with the sheet of polymeric material having a texture or appearance simulating paper of Fig. 2 by one method of wrapping.

[0008] Fig. 5 is a perspective view of a decorative cover for the floral grouping formed from the sheet of polymeric material having a texture or appearance simulating paper of Fig. 2 wherein the decorative cover formed from the sheet of polymeric material has a conical configuration.

[0009] Fig. 6 is a perspective view of a decorative cover for the floral grouping formed from the sheet of polymeric material having a texture or

appearance simulating paper of Fig. 2 wherein the decorative cover has a substantially cylindrical configuration.

[0010] Fig. 7 is a perspective view of a decorative cover positioned about a flower pot wherein the decorative cover is formed from the sheet of polymeric material having a texture or appearance simulating paper of Fig.1.

[0011] Fig. 8 is a diagrammatic, cross-sectional view of a flower pot cover former and band applicator apparatus having the sheet of polymeric material having a texture or appearance simulating paper of Fig. 1 disposed above an opening of the flower pot cover former and band applicator and having a flower pot disposed above the sheet of polymeric material having a texture or appearance simulating paper.

[0012] Fig. 9A is a perspective view of a sheet of expanded core polymeric film having a texture or appearance simulating paper wherein an acrylic heat sealable lacquer is disposed on at least one surface thereof, one corner of the sheet of expanded core polymeric film being upwardly turned.

[0013] Fig. 9B is a perspective view of a laminated sheet of material wherein one surface is modified or textured to provide the sheet of laminated material with a texture or appearance simulating paper, one corner of the laminated sheet of material being upwardly turned.

[0014] Fig. 10 is a perspective view of a preformed pot cover formed from a sheet of polymeric material having a texture or appearance simulating paper.

[0015] Fig. 11 is a perspective view of the preformed pot cover of Fig. 10 having a flower pot disposed therein.

[0016] Fig. 12 is a diagrammatic, cross-sectional view of a male and female mold having a sheet of polymeric material having a texture or appearance simulating paper disposed therebetween for forming the preformed pot cover of Fig. 10.

[0017] Fig. 13 is a perspective view of a floral sleeve formed from the sheet of polymeric material having a texture or appearance simulating paper.

[0018] Fig. 14 is a perspective view of the floral sleeve of Fig. 13 disposed about a floral grouping.

[0019] Fig. 15 is a perspective view of a floral sleeve having a cinching member wherein the floral sleeve is formed from a sheet of polymeric material having a texture or appearance simulating paper.

[0020] Fig. 16 is a perspective view of the floral sleeve of Fig. 15 disposed about a floral grouping.

[0021] Fig. 17 is a side view of a sleeve having a detachable portion wherein the sleeve is formed from a sheet of polymeric material having a texture or appearance simulating paper.

[0022] Fig. 18 is a perspective view of the sleeve of Fig. 17 having a flower pot disposed therein.

[0023] Fig. 19 is a perspective view of a flower pot disposed in the sleeve of Fig. 17 wherein an upper portion of the sleeve has been removed to provide a decorative cover having a skirt.

[0024] Fig. 20A is a perspective view of a polymeric ribbon material having a texture or appearance simulating paper.

[0025] Fig. 20B is a perspective view of a polymeric ribbon material formed of an expanded core polymeric film having a texture or appearance simulating paper.

[0026] Fig. 20C is a perspective view of a laminated polymeric ribbon wherein at least one surface of the laminated polymeric ribbon is modified or textured to provide the laminated polymeric ribbon with a texture or appearance simulating paper.

Detailed Description of the Invention

[0027] Preformed flower pot covers formed of paper are well known in the art and have been used for several years for decorative purposes. The paper from which the preformed flower pot covers are formed may be colored and may be provided with a decorative pattern printed and/or embossed thereon to enhance the decorative appearance of the preformed flower pot cover formed therefrom.

[0028] The paper preformed flower pot covers of the prior art, however, are sensitive to water and humidity as well as pressure placed thereon, and unless the paper from which the preformed flower pot cover is formed is treated, several undesired characteristics and features are observed. For example, a preformed flower pot cover may leave stains on a surface on which the preformed flower pot cover is displayed. In another example, the paper may become discolored, or an ink disposed on the paper to provide the decorative appearance of the preformed flower pot cover may smear or run, thereby distorting or destroying the decorative appearance of the preformed flower pot cover. In addition, exposure to stressors such as water and pressure can leave the paper more sensitive to tearing, which also distorts or destroys the decorative appearance of a preformed flower pot cover formed therefrom.

[0029] To overcome the disadvantages of paper, preformed flower pot covers have also been formed of polymeric film. While the polymeric film is more durable and not as sensitive to water, humidity and pressure as paper, the visible characteristics of polymeric film include a sheen which can readily be detected as polymeric film, and polymeric film does not have the soft feel or texture of paper which may be desired.

[0030] While the prior art methods of forming preformed flower pot covers from paper or polymeric film have been widely accepted, new and improved methods for making preformed flower pot covers having the visible characteristics of paper, such as the texture or appearance of paper, and the physical characteristics of polymeric film, such as improved durability and decreased sensitivity to water, humidity and pressure when compared to paper, are being sought. It is to such preformed flower pot covers and methods for making same that the present invention is directed.

Description of Figures 1-9

[0031] Referring now to Figs. 1 and 2, designated generally by the reference numeral 10 is a sheet or web of polymeric material having a texture or appearance 12 simulating the texture or appearance of paper (hereinafter referred to as the sheet of polymeric material 10 or the sheet of polymeric material 10 having the texture or appearance 12 simulating the texture or appearance of paper). That is, at least a portion of one surface of the sheet of

polymeric material 10 has been modified to provide a matte or textured finish which provides the texture or appearance 12 simulating the texture or appearance of paper. The term "texture or appearance simulating the texture or appearance of paper" is used interchangeably herein with the terms "texture or appearance simulating paper", "matte or textured finish simulating the texture or appearance of paper", and "appearance of being fabricated of paper". It is to be understood that the sheet of polymeric material 10 may be provided with both a texture and appearance simulating the texture and appearance of paper.

[0032] While the sheet of polymeric material 10 is provided with visible characteristics simulating paper on at least a portion of one surface thereof, such as the texture or appearance 12 simulating the texture or appearance of paper on at least a portion of one surface thereof, the sheet of polymeric material 10 maintains the physical characteristics of the polymer from which the sheet of polymeric material 10 is formed, that is, the sheet of polymeric material 10 maintains the mechanical and structural characteristics of the polymer, such as increased durability and decreased sensitivity to water, humidity and pressure as compared to paper. In other words, at least a portion of one surface of the sheet of polymeric material 10 looks like paper while the entire sheet of polymeric material 10 behaves like polymeric material, and the

texture or appearance 12 simulating the texture or appearance of paper is provided for a decorative purpose rather than a functional one.

[0033] The modification of the sheet of polymeric material 10 to provide the sheet of polymeric material 10 with a matte or textured finish which provides the texture or appearance 12 simulating paper in texture or appearance can be accomplished in several ways. For example, a matte finish can be provided by printing a desired pattern on the sheet of polymeric material 10 and thereafter laminating a matte material, such as a translucent polymeric film, over the printed pattern. To further enhance the texture or appearance 12 simulating paper of the sheet of polymeric material 10, the matte material may or may not have a plurality of spatially disposed holes extending therethrough. A matte or textured finish can also be produced by printing a sheet of polymeric material 10 with a matted (i.e. dull finish) ink, by lacquering at least one surface of the sheet of polymeric material 10 with a dull finish lacquer or a matting lacquer, by embossing the sheet of polymeric material 10 to provide an embossed pattern simulating the texture of paper, or by embossing and printing the sheet of polymeric material 10 to provide embossed and printed patterns having the texture or appearance 12 simulating the texture or appearance of paper wherein the embossed and printed patterns may be in registry, out of registry, or wherein a portion of the embossed and printed patterns are in registry and a portion of the embossed and printed

patterns are out of registry. A matte or textured finish capable of providing the sheet of polymeric material 10 with the texture or appearance 12 simulating paper can also be achieved by extruding a polymeric resin onto a matted or textured chill roll or by laminating a second sheet of material to the sheet of polymeric material 10. A matte or textured finish capable of providing the sheet of polymeric material 10 with the texture or appearance 12 simulating paper can also be achieved through the use of selected pigments, such as TiO_2.

[0034] The sheet of polymeric material 10 having the texture or appearance 12 simulating paper has an upper surface 14, a lower surface 16, and an outer peripheral edge 18. At least one surface of the sheet of polymeric material 10, such as the lower surface 16, is matted or textured as described above to provide the sheet of polymeric material 10 with the texture or appearance 12 simulating paper. The outer peripheral edge 18 of the sheet of polymeric material 10 comprises a first side 20, a second side 22, a third side 24, and a fourth side 26. A bonding material 27 (Fig. 2) may be disposed on at least a portion of one or both of the upper and lower surfaces 14 and 16 of the sheet of polymeric material 10, such as the upper surface 14 thereof as shown and as further illustrated in U.S. Patent No. 5,181,364, issued January 26, 1993 to Weder and entitled "WRAPPING A FLORAL GROUPING WITH SHEETS HAVING ADHESIVE OR COHESIVE MATERIAL APPLIED THERETO", the Specification of which is hereby expressly incorporated herein by reference.

[0035] The sheet of polymeric material 10 having the texture or appearance 12 simulating paper may be employed to provide a decorative cover for a floral grouping (Figs. 3 through 6) or a decorative cover for a flower pot (Fig. 7); to form a preformed flower pot cover for covering a flower pot (Figs. 10 and 11); to provide a sleeve for wrapping or covering a floral grouping (Figs. 13 through 16) or a flower pot (Figs. 17 through 19); or to provide a ribbon material (Figs. 20A through 20C). The use of the sheet of polymeric material 10 to form a decorative cover for a floral grouping or a flower pot wherein the decorative cover is provided with a texture or appearance simulating the texture or appearance of paper, or to form a sleeve for a floral grouping or a flower pot wherein the sleeve is provided with a texture or appearance simulating the texture or appearance of paper, or to form a preformed flower pot cover having a texture or appearance simulating the texture or appearance of paper, or as a ribbon material having a texture or appearance simulating the texture or appearance of paper will be described in more complete detail herein.

[0036] As noted above, the sheet of polymeric material 10 having the texture or appearance 12 simulating the texture or appearance of paper can be utilized to form a decorative cover for a floral grouping or a flower pot. The term "flower pot" as used herein refers to any type of container for holding a floral grouping, or a plant, or even another pot-type container. Examples of

flower pots and/or pot-type containers include, but are not limited to, clay pots, wooden pots, plastic pots, pots made from natural and/or synthetic fibers, or any combination thereof. Such flower pots and or pot-type containers are provided with a retaining space for receiving a floral grouping. The floral grouping may be disposed within the retaining space of the flower pot with a suitable growing medium described in further detail below, or other retaining medium, such as a floral foam. It will also be understood that in some cases the floral grouping, and any appropriate growing medium or other retaining medium, may be disposed in a sleeve formed from the sheet of polymeric material 10 if the sleeve is adapted to contain a medium.

[0037] "Floral grouping" as used herein includes cut fresh flowers, artificial flowers, a single flower or other fresh and/or artificial plants or other floral materials and may include other secondary plants and/or ornamentation or artificial or natural materials which add to the aesthetics of the overall floral grouping. Further, the floral grouping may comprise a growing potted plant having a root portion as well. However, it will be appreciated that the floral grouping may consist of only a single bloom or only foliage, or a botanical item (not shown), or a propagule. The term "floral grouping" may be used interchangeably herein with the term "floral arrangement". The term "floral grouping" may also be used interchangeably herein with the terms "botanical item" and/or "propagule."

[0038] The term "growing medium" when used herein includes any liquid, solid or gaseous material used for plant growth or for the cultivation of propagules, including organic and inorganic materials such as soil, humus, perlite, vermiculite, sand, water, and including the nutrients, fertilizers or hormones or combinations thereof required by the plants or propagules for growth.

[0039] The term "botanical item" when used herein refers to a natural or artificial herbaceous or woody plant, taken singularly or in combination. The term "botanical item" also includes any portion or portions of natural or artificial herbaceous or woody plants including stems, leaves, flowers, blossoms, buds, blooms, cones, or roots, taken singularly or in combination, or in groupings of such portions such as bouquets or floral groupings.

[0040] The term "propagule" when used herein refers to any structure capable of being propagated or acting as an agent of reproduction including seeds, shoots, stems, runners, tubers, plants, leaves, roots or spores.

[0041] In the embodiments shown in the drawings, the sheet of polymeric material 10 having the texture or appearance 12 simulating paper in texture or appearance is square. It will be appreciated, however, that the sheet of polymeric material 10 having the texture or appearance 12 simulating paper in texture or appearance can be of any shape, configuration or size as long as the sheet of polymeric material 10 is sufficiently sized and shaped to wrap and

encompass a floral grouping or a flower pot. For example, the sheet of polymeric material 10 may have a rectangular, round, oval, octagonal or asymmetrical shape. Further, multiple sheets of the polymeric material 10 may be used in a single circumstance to provide a decorative cover or sleeve for a floral grouping or a flower pot. Moreover, when multiple sheets of the polymeric material 10 having the texture or appearance 12 simulating paper in texture or appearance are used in combination, the sheets of polymeric material 10 need not be uniform in size or shape. Finally, it will be appreciated that the sheet of polymeric material 10 having the texture or appearance 12 simulating the texture or appearance of paper shown herein is a substantially flat sheet except for the texturing, matting, embossing, flocking, application of a foamable lacquer or foamable ink, or other treatments and techniques employed to provide the sheet of polymeric material 10 with the desired texture or matting so that the sheet of polymeric material 10 has the texture or appearance 12 simulating the texture or appearance of paper.

[0042] Any thickness or stiffness of the sheet of polymeric material 10 may be utilized in accordance with the present invention as long as the sheet of polymeric material 10 can be modified to provide the sheet of polymeric material with the texture or appearance 12 simulating the texture or appearance of paper and the sheet of polymeric material 10 having the texture or appearance 12 simulating paper can be wrapped about at least a portion of

a floral grouping or a flower pot to form a decorative cover for the floral grouping or the flower pot, or formed into a preformed flower pot cover for covering a flower pot, or a sleeve for wrapping or covering a floral grouping or a flower pot, or to provide a ribbon. Generally, the sheet of polymeric material 10 will have a thickness of from about 0.1 mil to about 30 mil, and more desirably a thickness of from about 0.5 mil to about 10 mil.

[0043] The terms "polymer film", "polymeric film" and "polymeric material" when used herein refer to a synthetic polymer such as polypropylene or polyethylene, a naturally occurring polymer such as cellophane, an extruded polymeric material having an expanded core such as extruded polypropylene having an expanded core and combinations thereof. The extruded polymeric material having an expanded core may also be referred to herein as an expanded core polymeric material.

[0044] "Extruded polymeric material having an expanded core" or "expanded core polymeric film" as used herein includes any extrudable polymeric material or polymeric film in which the core is expanded during extrusion, such as by incorporation of a blowing agent in the polymeric resin which is being extruded.

[0045] The sheet of polymeric material 10 having the texture or appearance 12 simulating the texture or appearance of paper may also be constructed, in whole or in part, from a cling material. "Cling material" when

used herein includes any material which is capable of connecting to the sheet of material and/or itself upon contacting engagement during the wrapping process and is wrappable about an item, whereby portions of the cling material contactingly engage and connect to other portions of another material, or, alternatively, itself, for generally securing the material wrapped about at least a portion of a flower pot. This connecting engagement is preferably temporary in that the material may be easily removed, i.e., the cling material "clings" to the flower pot.

[0046] The cling material is constructed from polyethylene such as Cling Wrap made by Glad®, First Brands Corporation, Danbury, Connecticut and may be treated if necessary. The thickness of the cling material will, in part, depend upon the size of sleeve and the size of the flower pot in the sleeve, i.e., generally, a larger flower pot may require a thicker and therefore stronger cling material. The cling material will range in thickness from about 0.1 mil to about 10 mil, and more desirably from about 0.5 mil to about 2.5 mil. However, any thickness of cling material may be utilized in accordance with the present invention which permits the cling material to be modified as hereinbefore described to provide the cling material with a texture or appearance simulating the texture or appearance of paper.

[0047] A decorative cover for a floral grouping (Figs. 3 through 6), or a decorative cover for a flower pot (Fig. 7), or a preformed flower pot cover for

covering a flower pot (Figs. 10 and 11), or a sleeve for wrapping or covering a floral grouping (Figs. 14 and 16) or a flower pot (Figs. 17 through 19), or a ribbon material (Figs. 20A through 20C) may also be constructed of a laminated material having a texture or appearance simulating paper in texture or appearance (Fig. 9B), wherein the texture or appearance simulating paper provides a decorative appearance to the decorative cover, preformed flower pot cover, sleeve or ribbon material while maintaining the structural and mechanical characteristics of the polymeric material from which the laminated material is formed. The laminated material having a texture or appearance simulating the texture or appearance of paper can be produced by laminating two or more sheets of polymeric film (such as two or more sheets of polypropylene film or a sheet of polypropylene film and a sheet of expanded core polymeric film, such as expanded core polypropylene film), or by laminating a polymeric film (such as polypropylene film or an expanded core polymeric film) to metallized foil and the like wherein at least one surface of the laminated material is textured or modified to simulate the texture or appearance of paper. The only requirements in using a laminated material having a texture or appearance simulating paper in texture or appearance to form a decorative cover for a floral grouping, a decorative cover for a flower pot, a preformed flower pot cover for covering a flower pot, a sleeve for wrapping or covering a floral grouping or a flower pot, or as ribbon material in accordance with the present invention is

that at least a portion of one surface of the laminated material be capable of being modified to provide the laminated material with at least a portion of one surface having a texture or appearance simulating the texture or appearance of paper, that the laminated material be sufficiently flexible or pliable to permit the laminated material to be formed into a decorative cover, a preformed flower pot cover, a sleeve, or ribbon material, and that the decorative cover, preformed flower pot cover, sleeve or ribbon material formed therefrom maintains the structural and mechanical characteristics of the polymeric material from which the laminated material is formed. It should also be noted that two or more separate sheets of polymeric material can be used to form a decorative cover for a floral grouping, or a decorative cover for a flower pot, or a preformed flower pot cover for covering a flower pot, or a sleeve for wrapping or covering a floral grouping or a flower pot as long as one of the sheets of polymeric material is modified or textured to provide same with a texture or appearance simulating paper.

[0048] The sheet of polymeric material 10 or a laminated material (Fig. 9B) having the texture or appearance 12 simulating the texture or appearance of paper may vary in color. Further, at least a portion of one of the upper and lower surfaces 14 and 16 of the sheet of polymeric material 10 or a laminated material may be provided with other decorative patterns or designs in addition to the matting, texturing, flocking, application of lacquers or foamable inks, or

embossing employed to impart a paper-like texture or appearance to the sheet of polymeric material 10 or the laminated material. Such decorative patterns may include a printed pattern and/or an embossed pattern, and when used in combination, the printed and embossed patterns may be in or out of registry with one another.

[0049] As illustrated in Fig. 3, the sheet of polymeric material 10 has a width 30 extending generally between the first side 20 and the second side 22, respectively, sufficiently sized whereby the sheet of polymeric material 10 can be wrapped about and encompass a floral grouping or a flower pot. The sheet of polymeric material 10 has a length 32 extending generally between the third side 24 and the fourth side 26, respectively, sufficiently sized whereby the sheet of polymeric material 10 extends over a substantial portion of the floral grouping when the sheet of polymeric material 10 has been wrapped about the floral grouping in accordance with the present invention, as described in detail herein. The sheet of polymeric material 10 may also be wrapped about a flower pot to substantially wrap and cover the flower pot in accordance with the present invention.

[0050] A plurality of sheets of polymeric material 10 having the texture or appearance 12 simulating the texture or appearance of paper may be connected together to form a roll as is shown in U.S. Patent No. 5,459,976, issued to Weder et al on October 24, 1995, entitled "MATERIAL AND ADHESIVE

STRIP DISPENSER", the Specification of which is hereby expressly incorporated in its entirety herein by reference.

[0051] Figs. 3-5 illustrate the use of the sheet of polymeric material 10 having the texture or appearance 12 simulating the texture or appearance of paper for wrapping a floral grouping 34 to provide a decorative cover 36 having a texture or appearance simulating paper on at least a portion of one surface thereof (Fig. 5) for the floral grouping 34 wherein the decorative cover 36 is provided with a decorative appearance (i.e., the texture or appearance simulating paper) while maintaining the structural and mechanical characteristics of the sheet of polymeric material 10 has an open upper end 38 and a lower end 40. The sheet of polymeric material 10 may optionally have the strip of bonding material 27 disposed upon the upper surface 14, the lower surface 16 or both, such as the strip of bonding material 27 disposed along at least a portion of the upper surface 14 of the sheet of polymeric material 10 so that the strip of bonding material 27 is disposed substantially adjacent the fourth side 26 thereof substantially as shown in Figs. 3 and 4. Further, the sheet of polymeric material 10 having the texture or appearance 12 simulating the texture or appearance of paper can be provided either as an individual sheet or from a pad or roll of material.

[0052] The bonding material 27, if present, may have a backing or release strip (not shown). The backing or release strip may be left applied for a period

of time to the bonding material 27 after it is disposed on a surface of the sheet of polymeric material 10 prior to its use as a wrapping material in order to protect the bonding qualities of the strip of bonding material 27.

[0053] In operation, an operator may dispose the sheet of polymeric material 10 having the texture or appearance 12 simulating the texture or appearance of paper on a support surface (not shown) whereby the lower surface 16 of the sheet of polymeric material 10 (which has been modified to provide the sheet of polymeric material 10 with the texture or appearance 12 simulating the texture or appearance of paper) contacts the support surface. Referring more specifically to Figs. 3-5, the floral grouping 34 is placed upon the upper surface 14 of the sheet of polymeric material 10 in a diagonal orientation. The floral grouping 34 has an upper bloom or foliage portion 42 and a lower stem portion 44. The sheet of polymeric material 10 is then wrapped about the floral grouping 34 by the operator (Figs. 4 and 5), the operator overlapping a portion of the sheet of polymeric material 10 over another portion of the sheet of polymeric material 10. That is, for example, the operator places the first side 20 of the sheet of polymeric material 10 over the floral grouping 34, as shown in Fig. 4. The operator continues to roll the floral grouping 34 and the sheet of polymeric material 10 in the direction toward the second side 22 of the sheet of polymeric material 10 until the upper surface 14 adjacent to fourth side 26 firmly engages the lower surface 16 of the sheet of

polymeric material 10, wherein the floral grouping 34 is substantially encompassed by the sheet of polymeric material 10, and wherein the bonding material 27 on the upper surface 14 of the sheet of polymeric material 10 contacts the lower surface 16 of the sheet of polymeric material 10 to provide the decorative cover 36 having the texture or appearance 12 simulating the texture or appearance of paper which substantially encompasses and surrounds a substantial portion of the floral grouping 34. Fig. 5 shows the floral grouping 34 wrapped in a conical fashion to provide the decorative cover 36 for the floral grouping 34 wherein the decorative cover 36 has the texture or appearance 12 simulating paper. When the floral grouping 34 is wrapped in a conical fashion, the bloom portion 42 of the floral grouping 34 is exposed substantially adjacent the open upper end 38 of the decorative cover 36, and the stem portion 44 of the floral grouping 34 is exposed substantially adjacent the lower end 40 of the decorative cover 36.

[0054] In another embodiment, illustrated in Fig. 6, the sheet of polymeric material 10 having the texture or appearance 12 simulating paper in texture or appearance is utilized to wrap the floral grouping 34 in a cylindrical fashion. The floral grouping 34 is disposed upon the sheet of polymeric material 10 approximately parallel to the third side 24 of the sheet of polymeric material 10. The sheet of polymeric material 10 is wrapped generally about the stem portion 44 of the floral grouping 34 to a position wherein the fourth side 26 of

the sheet of polymeric material 10 generally overlaps the third side 24 of the sheet of polymeric material 10 in a cylindrical fashion. It should be noted that the sheet of polymeric material 10 may be wrapped a plurality of times about the stem portion 44 of the floral grouping 34 before the overlapping of the third side 24 and the fourth side 26 of the sheet of polymeric material 10. As before, the portion of the sheet of polymeric material 10 near the fourth side 26 is disposed generally adjacent another portion of the sheet of polymeric material 10, and the two adjacent portions then are brought into contact where they may be bondingly engaged, thereby securing the sheet of polymeric material 10 generally about the floral grouping 34 so as to provide a decorative cover 36a having the texture or appearance 12 simulating paper for the floral grouping 34. The decorative cover 36a is provided with a decorative appearance (i.e., the texture or appearance 12 simulating paper) while maintaining the structural and mechanical characteristics of the sheet of polymeric material 10 from which the decorative cover 36a is formed.

[0055] In another version of the invention, the sheet of polymeric material 10 having the texture or appearance 12 simulating the texture or appearance of paper may be used to wrap a flower pot or pot-type container, as noted above. Shown in Fig.7 is a flower pot designated by the reference numeral 50 having an open upper end 52, a bottom end 54, an outer peripheral surface 56, and an inner retaining space 58 within which may be disposed a growing

medium. The flower pot 50 may contain a botanical item, such as a plant 60, which has an upper portion 62 comprising blooms or foliage or both.

[0056] The sheet of polymeric material 10 having the texture or appearance 12 simulating the texture or appearance of paper may be wrapped about the flower pot 50 by any one of numerous methods used to wrap sheets of material about flower pots to form decorative pot covers for flower pots, such as a decorative cover 61 having the texture or appearance 12 simulating the texture or appearance of paper disposed about the flower pot 50 illustrated in Fig. 7. The sheet of polymeric material 10 having the texture or appearance 12 simulating paper may, for example, be formed by hand about the outer peripheral surface 56 of the flower pot 50 to produce the decorative cover 61 which has the appearance of being fabricated of paper. The decorative cover 61 can then be secured about the flower pot 50 by a bonding material or by an elastic band 64 such that the open upper end 52 of the flower pot 50 remains substantially uncovered by the decorative cover 61, substantially as shown in Fig. 7. The decorative cover 61 is provided with a decorative appearance (i.e., the texture or appearance 12 simulating paper) while maintaining the structural and mechanical characteristics of the sheet of polymeric material 10 from which the decorative cover 61 is formed.

[0057] Referring now to Fig. 8, a flower pot cover former and band applicator device 66 for forming the sheet of polymeric material 10 having a

texture or appearance simulating the texture or appearance of paper into the decorative cover 61 for the flower pot 50 of Fig. 7 is illustrated. The flower pot cover former and band applicator device 66 comprises a band applicator 68 and a flower pot cover former 70. The flower pot cover former and band applicator device 66 has a support platform 72 with an opening 74 formed therein. A band, such as the elastic band 64, is disposed circumferentially about the opening 74 in the support platform 72.

[0058] The lower surface 16 of the sheet of polymeric material 10 (which has been modified to provide the sheet of polymeric material 10 with the texture or appearance 12 simulating paper in texture or appearance) is positioned on an upper surface 76 on the support platform 72 such that the sheet of polymeric material 10 is positioned over the opening 74 in the support platform 72. The flower pot 50 is positioned above the sheet of polymeric material 10 and is moved in a direction 78 into the opening 74 of the flower pot cover former and band applicator device 66. As the flower pot 50 is moved into the opening 74, the sheet of polymeric material 10 is pressed about the outer peripheral surface 56 of the flower pot 50 thereby forming the decorative cover 61 having the texture or appearance 12 simulating paper about the flower pot 50. The decorative cover 61, which has the texture or appearance 12 simulating the texture or appearance of paper, is then secured about the flower pot 50 by the elastic band 64. The flower pot 50 having the decorative cover

61 secured thereto is then moved in a direction 80 out of the opening 74 in the support platform 72.

[0059] The elastic band 64 can be applied manually or automatically such as by the method shown in U.S. Patent No. 5,105,599 issued to Weder et al. on April 21, 1992, entitled "Means For Securing A Decorative Cover About A Flower Pot", which is hereby expressly incorporated herein by reference. The band 64 can also be applied as a tie using a method such as described in "Single Station Covering and Fastening System", U.S. Patent No. 5,609,009, issued to Weder et al. on March 11, 1997, the Specification of which is hereby expressly incorporated herein by reference. The sheet of polymeric material 10 having the texture or appearance 12 simulating the texture or appearance of paper can also be applied automatically about the flower pot 50, for example, by methods shown in U.S. Patent Nos. 4,733,521, issued to Weder et al on March 29, 1988 and entitled "Cover Forming Apparatus"; and 5,291,721, issued to Weder et al on March 8, 1994, entitled "Cover Forming Apparatus Having Pivoting Forming Members", both of which are hereby expressly incorporated herein by reference.

[0060] Instead of securing the decorative cover 61 about the flower pot 50 via the elastic band 64, the decorative cover 61 formed from the sheet of polymeric material 10 having the texture or appearance 12 simulating the texture or appearance of paper may be secured to the flower pot 50 by the use

of one or more bonding materials. For example, the upper surface 14 of the sheet of polymeric material 10 may have a bonding material, such as the bonding material 27, disposed upon a portion thereof. When the sheet of polymeric material 10 is disposed about the flower pot 50, at least a portion of the upper surface 14 of the sheet of polymeric material 10 contacts the outer peripheral surface 56 of the flower pot 50 and is thereby bonded and held about the flower pot 50 via the bonding material.

[0061] The bonding material 27 may cover a portion of the upper surface 14 of the sheet of polymeric material 10, or the bonding material 27 may entirely cover the upper surface 14 of the sheet of polymeric material 10. The bonding material 27 may be disposed on the upper surface 14 of the sheet of polymeric material 10 in the form of a strip or in the form of spaced-apart spots. One method for disposing the bonding material 27 on the sheet of polymeric material 10 is described in U.S. Patent No. 5,111,637, entitled "Method For Wrapping A Floral Grouping", issued to Weder, et al. on May 12, 1992, which is expressly incorporated herein by reference.

[0062] The term "bonding material" when used herein can refer to an adhesive, frequently a pressure sensitive adhesive, or a cohesive or any adhesive/cohesive combination having adhesive qualities (i.e., qualities of adhesion or adhesion/cohesion, respectively) sufficient to cause the attachment of a portion of the sheet of polymeric material 10 to itself, to the floral grouping

34, or to the flower pot 50. Since the bonding material 27 may comprise either an adhesive or an adhesive/cohesive combination, it will be appreciated that both adhesives and cohesives are known in the art, and both are commercially available. When the bonding material 27 is a cohesive, a similar cohesive material must be placed on the adjacent surface for bondingly contacting and bondingly engaging with the cohesive material.

[0063] The term "bonding material" also includes materials which are heat sealable and, in this instance, the adjacent portions of the material must be brought into contact and then heat must be applied to effect the seal. The term "bonding material" also includes materials which are sonically sealable and vibratory sealable. The term "bonding material" when used herein also means a heat sealing lacquer or hot melt material which may be applied to the material and, in this instance, heat, sound waves, or vibrations, also must be applied to effect the sealing.

[0064] The term "bonding material" when used herein also includes any type of material or thing which can be used to effect the bonding or connecting of the two adjacent portions of the sheet of polymeric material 10 to effect the connection or bonding described herein. The term "bonding material" may also include ties, labels, bands, ribbons, strings, tapes (including single or double-sided adhesive tapes), staples or combinations thereof. Some of the bonding materials would secure the ends of the material while other bonding materials

may bind the circumference of a cover, or a sleeve, or, alternatively and/or in addition, the bonding materials would secure overlapping folds in the material and/or sleeve. Another way to secure the cover and/or sleeve is to heat seal the ends of the material to another portion of the material. One way to do this is to contact the ends with an iron of sufficient heat to heat seal the material.

[0065] Alternatively, a cold seal adhesive may be utilized as the bonding material 27. The cold seal adhesive adheres only to a similar substrate, acting similarly as a cohesive, and binds only to itself. The cold seal adhesive, since it bonds only to a similar substrate, does not cause a residue to build up on equipment, thereby both permitting much more rapid disposition and use of such equipment to form articles and reducing labor costs. Further, since no heat is required to effect the seal, the dwell time, that is, the time for the sheet of material to form and retain the shape of an article, such as a flower pot cover or flower pot, is reduced. A cold seal adhesive binds quickly and easily with minimal pressure, and such a seal is not readily releasable. This characteristic is different from, for example, a pressure sensitive adhesive.

[0066] The term "bonding material" when used herein also includes any heat or chemically shrinkable material, and static electrical or other electrical materials, chemical welding materials, magnetic materials, mechanical or barb-type fastening materials or clamps, curl-type characteristics of the film or materials incorporated in material which can cause the material to take on

certain shapes, cling films, slots, grooves, shrinkable materials and bands, curl materials, springs, and any type of welding method which may weld portions of the material to itself or to the pot, or to both the material itself and the pot.

Description of Figs. 9-12

[0067] Referring now to Figs. 10 and 11, a decorative preformed flower pot cover 110 having a texture or appearance 111 simulating the texture or appearance of paper on at least a portion of one surface thereof is illustrated constructed from a sheet of polymeric material having at least a portion of one surface thereof textured or modified to provide the sheet of polymeric material with a texture or appearance simulating the texture or appearance of paper. The decorative preformed flower pot cover 110 is provided with a decorative appearance (i.e., the texture or appearance 111 simulating paper) while maintaining the structural and mechanical characteristics of the sheet of polymeric material from which the decorative preformed flower pot cover 110 is formed. The polymeric material having a texture or appearance simulating the texture or appearance of paper is a flexible material such as the sheet of polymeric material 10 having the texture or appearance 12 simulating the texture or appearance of paper (Fig. 1), or a sheet of flexible material 112 having a texture or appearance 113 simulating the texture or appearance of paper (Fig. 9A) or a flexible laminated sheet of material 112a having a texture or appearance 113a simulating the texture or appearance of paper (Fig. 9B).

In the embodiment shown in Fig. 9A, the sheet of flexible material 112 having the texture or appearance 113 simulating the texture or appearance of paper used in the construction of the decorative preformed flower pot cover 110 comprises a sheet of expanded core polymeric material 114 having an upper surface 116, a lower surface 118 and the texture or appearance 113 simulating the texture or appearance of paper. The thickness of the sheet of expanded core polymeric material 114 may vary as long as the sheet of expanded core polymeric material 114 functions in accordance with the present invention. Generally, the sheet of expanded core polymeric material 114 will have a thickness in the range of from about 0.5 mil to about 10 mil, and desirably in the range of from about 0.6 mil to about 1.25 mil.

[0068] The sheet of expanded core polymeric material 114 is provided with a coating of an acrylic heat sealable lacquer 120 disposed on at least one of the upper and lower surfaces 116 and 118 thereof. It should be understood, however, that the sheet of flexible material 112 is not limited to being the sheet of expanded core polymeric film 114 having the texture or appearance 113 simulating the texture or appearance of paper; rather, the sheet of flexible material 112 can be any flexible polymeric material or flexible laminated material, such as the polymeric material 10 or the laminated polymeric material 112a, which can be modified or textured so that at least one surface of such polymeric material or laminated material is provided with a finish or texture

simulating paper in appearance while maintaining the structural and mechanical characteristics of such polymeric or laminated material.

[0069] As previously stated, the modification of the polymeric material or laminated polymeric material, such as the sheet of polymeric material 10, the sheet of flexible laminated polymeric material 112a, or the sheet of expanded core polymeric film 114 to provide the flexible material with the desired matte or textured finish can be accomplished by printing a desired pattern on the polymeric material and thereafter laminating a matte material, such as a translucent polymeric film, over the printed pattern. To further enhance the texture or appearance of the polymeric material so that the polymeric material assimilates the texture or appearance of paper, the matte material may or may not have a plurality of spatially disposed holes extending therethrough. A matte or textured finish can also be produced by printing a polymeric material with a matted (i.e. dull finish) ink, by lacquering at least one surface of the polymeric material with a dull finish lacquer or a matting lacquer, by embossing the polymeric material to provide an embossed pattern simulating the texture or appearance of paper, or by embossing and printing the polymeric material to provide embossed and printed patterns wherein the embossed and printed patterns may be in registry, out of registry or wherein a portion of the embossed and printed patterns are in registry and a portion of the embossed and printed patterns are out of registry. In addition, a matte or textured finish

capable a providing the flexible polymeric material with a texture or appearance simulating the texture or appearance of paper can be achieved by extruding a polymeric resin onto a matted or textured chill roll to produce the expanded core polymeric material, or by laminating a second sheet of material to the polymeric material, or by the use of selected pigments.

[0070] The sheet of flexible material 112 having the texture or appearance 113 simulating paper (Fig. 9A) or the sheet of flexible laminated material 112a having the texture or appearance 113a simulating the texture or appearance of paper (Fig. 9B) may vary in color. Further, the sheet of flexible material 112 or the sheet of flexible laminated material 112a may be provided with other decorative patterns or designs in addition to the matting, texturing, flocking, application of lacquers or foamable inks, or embossing employed to impart a texture or appearance simulating the texture or appearance of paper to the sheet of flexible material 112. For example, the sheet of flexible material 112 or the sheet of flexible laminated material 112a may be provided with a printed pattern and/or an embossed pattern in addition to the texture or appearance 113 or 113a simulating the texture or appearance of paper, and when provided in combination, the printed and embossed patterns may be in registry or out of registry with one another.

[0071] When the sheet of polymeric material, such as the sheet of flexible polymeric material 112, is formed into the decorative preformed flower pot

cover 110, a plurality of overlapping folds 122 are formed, and at least a portion of the overlapping folds 122 are connected to adjacently disposed portions of the decorative preformed flower pot cover 110 via the acrylic heat sealable lacquer 120.

[0072] As shown in Figs. 10 and 11, the decorative preformed flower pot cover 110 has a base 124 having an open upper end 125, a lower end 126, and an outer peripheral surface 128. An opening 130 intersects the open upper end 125 of the base 124 of the decorative preformed flower pot cover 110, forming an inner peripheral surface 132 which defines and encompasses a retaining space 133 within which a flower pot 134 containing a floral grouping 136 may be disposed in a manner well known in the art (Fig. 11). The decorative preformed flower pot cover 110 is further provided with a decorative border 138 which extends outwardly from the open upper end 125 of the base 124. The decorative border 138 is provided with an outer peripheral surface 139 and an inner peripheral surface 141.

[0073] In another embodiment, a sheet of flexible material 112a (Fig. 9B) is used in the construction of the decorative preformed flower pot cover 110. The sheet of flexible material 112a is a laminated material which comprises a first sheet of material 114a having an upper surface 116a and a lower surface 118a, and a second sheet of material 120a. At least a portion of one surface of one of the first sheet of material 114a and the second sheet of material 120a

is modified to provide the sheet of flexible material 112a with the desired texture or appearance 113a simulating the texture or appearance of paper. The sheet of flexible laminated material 112a having the texture or appearance 113a simulating the texture or appearance of paper can be produced by laminating two or more sheets of polymeric film (such as two or more sheets of polypropylene film or a sheet of polypropylene film and a sheet of expanded core polymeric film, such as expanded core polypropylene film), or by laminating a polymeric film (such as polypropylene film or an expanded core polymeric film) with a sheet of metallized foil and the like wherein at least one surface of the sheet of laminated material 112a is textured or modified to simulate paper in appearance. Desirably, the first sheet of material 114a is an expanded core polymeric film and the second sheet of material 120a is a substantially water impervious polymeric film. The sheet of flexible laminated material 112a is provided with the texture or appearance 113a simulating the texture or appearance of paper on at least a portion of one surface thereof while maintaining the structural and mechanical characteristics of the polymeric film(s) from which the sheet of flexible laminated material 112a is formed.

[0074] The first sheet of material 114a desirably has a thickness of from about 0.5 mil to about 10 mil, and more desirably from about 0.6 mil to about 1.25 mil, and the second sheet of material 120a desirably has a thickness of from about 0.5 mil to about 10 mil, and more desirably from about 0.6 mil to

about 1.25 mil. The second sheet or material 120a can be laminated to the first sheet of material 114a with a colored adhesive so as to impart a desired color to the laminated sheet of flexible material 112a. While the thickness of the sheet of flexible material 112a can vary widely and will generally depend on the thickness of the first sheet of material 114a and the thickness of the second sheet of material 120a, desirable results can be obtained where the sheet of flexible material 112a has a thickness in the range of from about 1 mil to about 20 mil, and more desirably from about 1.2 mil to about 2.5 mil.

[0075] As previously stated, the decorative preformed flower pot cover 110 may be constructed of the sheet of polymeric material 10 having the texture or appearance 12 simulating the texture or appearance of paper (Fig. 1), or of the sheet of the flexible material 112 having the texture or appearance 113 simulating paper (Fig. 9A), or of the laminated sheet of the flexible material 112a having the texture or appearance 113a simulating the texture or appearance of paper (Fig. 9B). Desirably, at least a portion of one surface of one of the base 124 and the decorative border 138 of the decorative, preformed flower pot cover 110 is provided with the texture or appearance 111 simulating the texture or appearance of paper. For example, the texture or appearance 111 simulating the texture or appearance of paper may be provided on at least a portion of the outer peripheral surface 128 of the base 124 or on at least a portion of one of the outer peripheral surface 139 and the inner

peripheral surface 141 of the decorative border 138, or the texture or appearance 111 simulating the texture or appearance of paper may be provided on a combination thereof.

[0076] The decorative preformed flower pot cover 110 so formed will have a plurality of overlapping folds 122 formed on the base 124 thereof, at least a portion thereof being connected so that the decorative preformed flower pot cover 110 may be substantially flattened and then unflattened to assume the original state of the decorative preformed flower pot cover 110. A substantial portion of the overlapping folds 122 extend over different distances and at various and arbitrary angles. The decorative border 138 of the decorative preformed flower pot cover 110 is substantially free of permanently connected overlapping folds. If desired, the decorative preformed flower pot cover 110 can be formed of a plurality of sheets of the same and/or different types of material.

[0077] The method and apparatus employed to form the decorative preformed flower pot cover 110 having the texture or appearance 111 simulating the texture or appearance of paper is substantially identical whether one uses one or more sheets of polymeric material 10 (Fig. 1), or one or more sheets of flexible polymeric material 112 (Fig. 9A), or one or more sheets of flexible material 112a (Fig. 9B), or a combination of such sheets of material. Thus, only the formation of the decorative preformed flower pot cover 110

having the texture or appearance 111 simulating the texture or appearance of paper using the sheet of flexible polymeric material 112 of Fig. 9A will be described in detail hereinafter.

[0078] The decorative preformed flower pot cover 110 may be formed using a conventional mold system 140 comprising a male mold 142 and a female mold 144 having a mold cavity 146 for matingly receiving the male mold 142 (Fig. 12). The sheet of flexible polymeric material 112 having the texture or appearance 113 simulating the texture or appearance of paper is positioned between the male and female molds 142 and 144, respectively. Movement of the male mold 142 in the direction 148 and into the mold cavity 146 forces the sheet of flexible polymeric material 112 to be disposed about the portion of the male mold 142 disposed in the mold cavity 146 of the female mold 144 and thereby forms the sheet of flexible polymeric material 112 into the preformed decorative flower pot cover 110 having the texture or appearance 111 simulating the texture or appearance of paper (Figs. 10 and 11). Further, in accordance with the present invention, the decorative preformed flower pot cover 110 constructed from the materials described herein above may have a bonding material disposed upon a portion thereof.

[0079] Methods for forming such preformed decorative pot covers are well known in the art. Two methods of forming such covers are described in U.S.

Patent Nos. 4,773,182 and 5,291,721, each of which is expressly incorporated herein by reference.

Description of Figs. 13-19

[0080] Shown in Fig. 13 is a decorative cover designated therein by the general reference numeral 160 which comprises a flexible bag or sleeve 162 of unitary construction having a texture or appearance 163 simulating the texture or appearance of paper on at least a portion of one surface thereof in accordance with the present invention. The sleeve 162 may be used as a decorative cover for a floral grouping or a flower pot. The sleeve 162 initially comprises a flexible flat collapsed piece of polymeric material which is openable in the form of a tube or sleeve. Such sleeves are well known in the floral industry. Further, in accordance with the present invention, the decorative cover 160 can be constructed of the sheet of polymeric material 10 (Fig. 1), or the sheet of flexible polymeric material 112 (Fig. 9A), or the sheet of laminated flexible polymeric material 112a (Fig. 9B) whereby at least a portion of one surface of the sleeve 162, preferably an outer peripheral surface 164 of the sleeve 162, has been modified to provide with sleeve 162 with the texture or appearance 163 simulating the texture or appearance of paper, as previously described herein. The sleeve 162 is provided with a decorative appearance (i.e., the texture or appearance 163 simulating the texture or appearance of

paper) while maintaining the structural and mechanical characteristics of the polymeric material from which the sleeve 162 is formed.

[0081] The sleeve 162 has an upper end 166, a lower end 168 and the outer peripheral surface 164. The sleeve 162 may be tapered outwardly from the lower end 168 toward a larger diameter at its upper end 166. In its flattened state the sleeve 162 generally has an overall trapezoidal or modified trapezoidal shape, and when opened is substantially frusto-conical in configuration. It will be appreciated, however, that the sleeve 162 may comprise variations on the aforementioned shapes or may comprise significantly altered shapes such as square or rectangular, wherein the sleeve 162 when opened has a cylindrical form, as long as the sleeve 162 functions in accordance with the present invention in the manner described herein. The sleeve 162 (or any other sleeve disclosed herein) may have an angular or contoured shape.

[0082] The sleeve 162 has an opening 170 at the upper end 166 and may be open at the lower end 168, or closed with a bottom at the lower end 168. The sleeve 162 also has an inner peripheral surface 172 which, when the sleeve 162 is opened, defines and encompasses an inner retaining space 174. When the lower end 168 of the sleeve 162 has a closed lower end 168, a portion of the lower end 168 may be inwardly folded to form one or more gussets (not shown) for allowing the lower portion of the inner retaining space 174 to be

expandable, for example, for receiving the circular bottom of a pot or growing medium.

[0083] The sleeve 162 is generally frusto-conically shaped, but the sleeve 162 may be, by way of example but not by way of limitation, cylindrical, frusto-conical, a combination of both frusto-conical and cylindrical, or any other shape, as long as the sleeve 162 functions as described herein as noted above. Further, the sleeve 162 may comprise any shape, whether geometric, non-geometric, asymmetrical and/or fanciful as long as it functions in accordance with the present invention. The sleeve 162 may also be equipped with drain holes (if having a closed bottom) or side ventilation holes (not shown), or can be made from gas permeable or impermeable materials.

[0084] The material from which the sleeve 162 is constructed is the same as previously described above for the sheet of polymeric material 10 having the texture or appearance 12 simulating the texture or appearance of paper, or the sheet of polymeric material 112 or 112a having the texture or appearance 113 or 113a, respectively, simulating the texture or appearance of paper. Any thickness of polymeric material may be utilized in accordance with the present invention as long as the sleeve 162 may be formed as described herein, is provided with the texture or appearance 163 simulating the texture or appearance of paper, and as long as the formed sleeve 162 may contain at least a portion of a flower pot or a floral grouping, as described herein.

Additionally, an insulating material such as bubble film, preferable as one of two or more layers, can be utilized in order to provide additional protection for the item, such as a floral grouping, contained therein.

[0085] In Fig. 14 the sleeve 162 is illustrated having the texture or appearance 163 simulating the texture or appearance of paper provided on at least a portion of the outer peripheral surface 164 of the sleeve 162. A floral grouping 176 is disposed within the inner retaining space 174 of the sleeve 162. Generally, an upper or bloom portion 178 of the floral grouping 176 is exposed substantially adjacent the opening 170 of the sleeve 162 and a lower or stem portion 180 of the floral grouping 176 is exposed substantially adjacent the lower end 168 of the sleeve 162. Either end of the sleeve 162 may be closed about the floral grouping 176. Generally, a portion of the sleeve 162 is tightened about a portion of the stem portion 180 of the floral grouping 176 for holding the decorative cover 160 about the floral grouping 176. For example, the sleeve 162 may be held by a tie 182 tied about the sleeve 162 such as is shown in Fig. 14. Other methods for binding the sleeve 162 about the floral grouping 176 may be employed such as the bonding materials described elsewhere herein. For example, as shown in Fig. 15, a decorative cover 160a is shown which comprises a sleeve 162a having a texture or appearance 163a simulating the texture or appearance of paper on at least a portion of one surface thereof and a cinching tab 184 having a bonding material 186 disposed

upon a surface thereof. The cinching tab 184 can be used to gather portions of the sleeve 162a together about the stem portion 180 of the floral grouping 176 as shown in Fig. 16 for holding the sleeve 162a tightly about the floral grouping 176.

[0086] Similarly, it may generally be desired to use the sleeve 162 as a decorative cover for a flower pot (not shown). The flower pot will generally contain a botanical item or plant. The flower pot can be deposited into the open sleeve 162 in a manner well known in the art, such as manually wherein the sleeve 162 is opened by hand and the flower pot deposited therein.

[0087] As noted above, a bonding material may be disposed on a portion of the sleeve 162 or any sleeve described herein to assist in holding the sleeve 162 to the flower pot when the flower pot is disposed within the sleeve 162 or to assist in closing the upper end 166 of the sleeve 162 or adhering the sleeve 162 to the flower pot after the flower pot has been disposed therein, as will be discussed in further detail below.

[0088] It will be understood that the bonding material, if present, may be disposed as a strip or block on a surface of the sleeve 162. The bonding material may also be disposed upon either the outer peripheral surface 164 or the inner peripheral surface 162 of the sleeve 162, as well as upon the flower pot. Further, the bonding material may be disposed as spots of bonding material, or in any other geometric, non-geometric, asymmetric, or fanciful

form, and in any pattern including covering either the entire inner peripheral surface 172 and/or outer peripheral surface 164 of the sleeve 162 and/or the flower pot. The bonding material may be covered by a cover or release strip which can be removed prior to the use of the sleeve 162 or flower pot. The bonding material can be applied by methods known to those of ordinary skill in their art. One method for disposing a bonding material, in this case an adhesive, is described in U.S. Patent No. 5,111,637, issued to Weder et al. on May 12, 1993, which is hereby expreslly incorporated herein by reference.

[0089] As noted above, a bonding material may be disposed on at least a portion of the inner peripheral surface 172 of the sleeve 162, or, alternatively, the bonding material may be disposed on the outer peripheral surface of a flower pot contained within the sleeve 162, while the sleeve 162 may be free of the bonding material. In a further alternative, the bonding material may be disposed both on at least a portion of the flower pot as well as upon at least a portion of the inner peripheral surface 172 of the sleeve 162. In addition, a portion of the bonding material may also be disposed on the outer peripheral surface 164 of the sleeve 162 as well. It will be understood that the bonding material may be disposed in a solid section of bonding material. The bonding material, when present, is disposed on the sleeve 162 and/or flower pot by any method known in the art.

[0090] Certain versions of sleeves described herein may be used in combination with a preformed pot cover. For example, a preformed pot cover may be applied to the pot, then the covered pot wrapped or disposed within a sleeve. Either the cover or the sleeve, or both, have a texture or appearance simulating the texture or appearance of paper. Examples of sleeves which may be used in this invention are shown in the specification of U.S. Patent No. 5,625,979, issued to Weder on May 6, 1997, the specification of which is expressly incorporated herein by reference in its entirety. Equipment and devices for forming sleeves are commercially available, and well known in the art.

[0091] Shown in Figs. 17 and 18 is another embodiment of a decorative cover 160b comprising a sleeve 162b having a texture or appearance 163b simulating the texture or appearance of paper constructed from the polymeric material 10, or the flexible polymeric material 112 or 112a in accordance with the present invention. The sleeve 162b is provided with a decorative appearance (i.e., the texture or appearance 163b simulating the texture or appearance of paper) while maintaining the structural and mechanical characteristics of the polymeric material from which the sleeve 162b is formed. The sleeve 162b has a "detaching" element in predetermined areas for detaching a portion of the sleeve 162b. The sleeve 162b generally initially comprises a flexible flat collapsed piece of material which is openable in the

form of a tube or sleeve. The sleeve 162b is constructed of the same material and in the same way as the sleeve 162 described previously herein and may be described exactly the same as the sleeve 162 described herein except for the additional elements described hereinafter.

[0092] The sleeve 162b has an upper end 166b, a lower end 168b, and an outer peripheral surface 164b. The sleeve 162b has an opening 170b at the upper end 166b thereof, and the sleeve 162b may be open at the lower end 168b or closed with a bottom at the lower end 168b. In a flattened state, the sleeve 162b has a first side 171 and a second side 173. The sleeve 162b also has an inner peripheral surface 172b which, when the sleeve 162b is opened, defines and encompasses an inner retaining space 174b as shown in Fig. 18. When the lower end 168b of the sleeve 162b has a closed bottom, a portion of the lower end 168b may be inwardly folded to form one or more gussets (not shown) for permitting a circular bottom of an object such as a flower pot 187, to be disposed in the inner retaining space 174b of the sleeve 162b.

[0093] As shown in Figs. 17 and 18, the sleeve 162b is demarcated into an upper portion 188 and a lower portion 190. The lower portion 190 of the sleeve 162b is generally sized to contain the flower pot 187. The upper portion 188 of the sleeve 162b is sized to substantially surround and encompass a plant 192 contained in the flower pot 187 disposed within the lower portion 190 of the sleeve 162b. The sleeve 162b is demarcated into the upper portion 188 and

the lower portion 190 by a detaching element 194 for enabling the detachment of the upper portion 188 of the sleeve 162b from the lower portion 190 of the sleeve 162b. In the present version, the detaching element 194 is a plurality of generally laterally-oriented or alternatingly diagonally-oriented perforations which extend circumferentially across the outer peripheral surface 164b of the sleeve 162b from the first side 171 to the second side 173.

[0094] In the embodiment shown in Figs. 17 and 18, the lower portion 190 of the sleeve 162b further comprises a base portion 196 and a skirt portion 198. The base portion 196 of the lower portion 190 of the sleeve 162b comprises that part of the lower portion 190 of the sleeve 162b which, when the flower pot 187 is placed into the lower portion 190 of the sleeve 162b, has an inner peripheral surface 172b which is substantially adjacent to and surrounds an outer peripheral surface 199 of the flower pot 187. The skirt portion 198 of the lower portion 190 of the sleeve 162b comprises that part of the lower portion 190 of the sleeve 162b which extends beyond an open upper end 201 of the flower pot 187 and adjacent at least a portion of the plant 192 contained within the flower pot 187 and which is left to freely extend at an angle, inwardly or outwardly, from the base portion 196 when the upper portion 188 of the sleeve 162b is detached from the lower portion 190 of the sleeve 162b by actuation of the detaching element 194.

[0095] In the intact sleeve 162b, the skirt portion 198 of the lower portion 190 of the sleeve 162b comprises an upper peripheral edge congruent with the detaching element 194 which is connected to a lower peripheral edge, also congruent with the detaching element 194, of the upper portion 188 of the sleeve 162b. In Figs. 17 and 18, the upper peripheral edge of the skirt portion 198 of the lower portion 190 of the sleeve 162b is congruent with a series of alternatingly diagonally-oriented lines of perforations which together form a zig-zag and comprise the detaching element 194. The upper portion 188 of the sleeve 162b may also have an additional detaching element 200 indicated as a plurality of vertical perforations for facilitating removal of the upper portion 188 of the sleeve 162b and which are disposed more or less vertically therein extending between the detaching element 194 of the sleeve 162b.

[0096] The upper portion 188 of the sleeve 162b is thereby separable from the lower portion 190 of the sleeve 162b by tearing the upper portion 188 along both the detaching element 200 and the detaching element 194, thereby separating the upper portion 188 from the lower portion 190 of the sleeve 162b. The lower portion 190 of the sleeve 162b remains disposed as the base portion 196 about the flower pot 187 and as the skirt portion 198 about the plant 192 forming a decorative cover 202 as shown in Fig. 19 which substantially surrounds and encompasses the flower pot 187 and the plant 192 contained therein. At least a portion of an outer peripheral surface 164b of the

lower portion 190 of the sleeve 162b, for example, the base and skirt portions 196 and 198, may be modified to provide the lower portion 190 of the sleeve 162b with the texture or appearance 163b simulating the texture or appearance of paper, while the upper portion 188 of the sleeve 162b is left unmodified or is provided with a printed pattern; or at least a portion of one surface of both the upper portion 188 and the lower portion 190 may be provided with a modified or textured surface so the both the upper portion 188 and the lower portion 190 of the sleeve 162 is provided with the texture or appearance 163b simulating paper. When the upper portion 188 is detached, the lower portion 190 of the sleeve 162b remains about the flower pot 176b and thereby forms a decorative cover about the flower pot 176b which has the appearance of paper.

[0097] "Detaching element" as used herein includes any element, or combination of elements, or features, such as, but not by way of limitation, perforations, tear strips, zippers, and any other devices or elements of this nature known in the art, or any combination thereof. Therefore, while perforations are shown and described in detail herein, it will be understood that tear strips, zippers, or any other "detaching elements" known in the art, or any combination thereof, could be substituted therefor and/or used therewith.

[0098] In a general method of use of the sleeve 162b as the decorative cover 202 for the flower pot 187, an operator provides the sleeve 162b and the

flower pot 187 having the plant 192 disposed in a growing medium 203 contained within the flower pot 187. The operator then disposes the flower pot 187 having the plant 192 contained therein into the sleeve 162b by opening the sleeve 162b at end the upper 166 thereof and assuring both that the opening 170b therein is in an open condition, and that the inner peripheral surface 172b of the sleeve 162b is somewhat expanded outward as well, as shown in Fig. 18. The operator then manually or automatically disposes the flower pot 187 into the opening 170b in the sleeve 162b, the flower pot 187 being disposed generally through the upper portion 188 of the sleeve 162b into generally the lower portion 190 of the sleeve 162b, the flower pot 187 remaining in the lower portion 190 of the sleeve 162b, permitting the sleeve 162b to substantially surround and tightly encompass the flower pot 187. It will be understood that alternatively, the sleeve 162b may be provided with an extension (not shown), and the sleeve 162b may be disposed on rods or wickets, and the flower pot 187 may then be disposed in the sleeve 162b either before or after the sleeve 162b has been removed from the wickets.

Embodiments of Figs. 20A-20C

[0099] Referring now to Fig. 20A, designated generally by the reference numeral 210 is a polymeric ribbon material having a texture or appearance 212 simulating the texture or appearance of paper for forming decorative bows and for wrapping items, wherein the polymeric ribbon material 210 maintains the

structural and mechanical characteristics of the polymer from which the polymeric ribbon material 210 is formed. That is, at least one surface of a web of polymeric material (not shown) is modified to provide a matte or textured finish which provides the texture or appearance 212 simulating the texture or appearance of paper. The modification of the web of polymeric material (not shown) to provide the polymeric ribbon material 210 with the matte or textured finish which provides the texture or appearance 212 simulating paper can be accomplished in several ways. For example, the polymeric ribbon material 210 having the matte or textured finish which provides the texture or appearance 212 simulating the texture or appearance of paper can be produced by printing a web of polymeric material with a matted (i.e. dull finish) ink, by lacquering at least one surface of the sheet of polymeric material with a dull finish lacquer or a matting lacquer, by embossing the sheet of polymeric material to provide an embossed pattern simulating the texture or appearance of paper, or by flocking the sheet of polymeric material, or by application of a foamable lacquer or foamable ink to the sheet of polymeric material, or by embossing and printing the sheet of polymeric material to provide embossed and printed patterns wherein the embossed and printed patterns may be in registry, out of registry or wherein a portion of the embossed and printed patterns are in registry and a portion of the embossed and printed patterns are out of registry. In addition, a matte or textured finish capable of providing the sheet of polymeric material

with the texture or appearance 212 simulating the texture or appearance of paper can be achieved by extruding a polymeric resin onto a matted or textured chill roll. Thereafter, the web of material having the texture or appearance 212 simulating the texture or appearance of paper can be cut in a conventional manner to provide the polymeric ribbon material 210 having the texture or appearance 212 simulating the texture or appearance of paper.

[0100] Any polymeric material capable of being textured or otherwise modified to provide the polymeric material with the texture or appearance 212 simulating the texture or appearance of paper can be employed in the formulation of the polymeric ribbon material 210. For example, the polymeric material employed to produce the polymeric ribbon material 210 can be polypropylene film having a thickness of from about 0.1 mil to about 30 mil, or an expanded core polymeric film having a thickness of from about 0.5 mil to about 10 mil.

[0101] Referring now to Fig. 20B, designated generally by the reference numeral 220 is another embodiment of a polymeric ribbon material for forming decorative bows and for wrapping items. The polymeric ribbon material 220 is a laminated material comprising a first web or sheet of material 222 having a thickness of from about 0.5 mil to about 10 mil, and more desirably from about 0.6 mil to about 1.25 mil, and a second web or sheet of material 224 having a thickness of from about 0.5 mil to about 10 mil, and more desirably from about

0.6 mil to about 1.25 mil. The laminated material can be produced by laminating two or more sheets of polymeric film (such as two or more sheets of polypropylene film or a sheet of polypropylene film and a sheet of expanded core polymeric film, such as expanded core polypropylene film), or by laminating a polymeric film (such as polypropylene film or an expanded core polymeric film) with a sheet of metallized foil and the like wherein at least one surface of the laminated material is textured or modified to simulate the texture or appearance of paper. The second web or sheet of material 224 is desirably laminated to the first web or sheet of material 222 with a colored adhesive so as to impart a desired color to the polymeric ribbon material 220. If desired the polymeric ribbon material 220 may be treated or otherwise processed to provide the polymeric ribbon material 220 with a matte or textured finish which provides a texture or appearance 226 simulating the texture or appearance of paper, while the polymeric ribbon material 220 maintains the structural and mechanical characteristics of the polymer from which the polymeric ribbon material 220 is formed. That is, a matte or textured finish which provides the texture or appearance 226 simulating paper in texture or appearance can be printed on at least a portion of one surface of the first web or sheet of material 222 and thereafter the second web or sheet of material 224 (which in this case is desirably a matte material of translucent polymeric film) is laminated to the first web or sheet of material 222 to provide the polymeric ribbon material with

the texture or appearance 226 simulating the texture or appearance of paper. To further enhance the texture or appearance 226 simulating the texture or appearance of paper of the polymeric ribbon material 220, the second web or sheet of material 224 may or may not have a plurality of spatially disposed holes extending therethrough. The matte or textured finish which provides the texture or appearance 226 simulating the texture or appearance of paper can be produced by printing at least one of the first and second webs or sheets of material 222 and 224 with a matted (i.e. dull finish) ink, by lacquering at least one surface of at least one of the first and second webs or sheets of material 222 and 224 with a dull finish lacquer or a matting lacquer, by flocking at least one of the first and second webs or sheets of material 222 and 224, by application of a foamable lacquer or foamable ink to at least one of the first and second webs or sheets of material 222 and 224, by embossing at least one of the first and second webs or sheets of material 222 and 224 to provide an embossed pattern simulating the appearance and texture of paper, or by embossing and printing at least one of the first and second webs or sheets of material 222 and 224 to provide embossed and printed patterns wherein the embossed and printed patterns may be in registry, out of registry or wherein a portion of the embossed and printed patterns are in registry and a portion of the embossed and printed patterns are out of registry. In addition, a matte or textured finish capable of providing the polymeric ribbon material 220 with the

texture or appearance 226 simulating the texture or appearance of paper can be achieved by extruding the resin used to produce one of the first and second webs or sheets of material 222 and 224 onto a matted or textured chill roll.

[0102] Referring now to Fig. 20C, designated generally by the reference numeral 230 is another embodiment of a polymeric ribbon material for forming decorative bows and for wrapping items. The polymeric ribbon material 230 comprises a polymeric film 232 having an upper surface 234 and a lower surface 236. An acrylic heat sealable lacquer 238 can applied to at least one of the upper and lower surfaces 234 and 236 of the polymeric film 232, such as the lower surface 236 of the polymeric film 232, and the upper surface 234 of the polymeric film 232 is desirably modified to provide the polymeric ribbon material 230 with a matte or textured finish which provides a texture or appearance 240 simulating the texture or appearance of paper, while the polymeric ribbon material 230 maintains the structural and mechanical characteristics of the polymer from which the polymeric ribbon material 230 is formed. The modification of the polymeric film 232 to provide the polymeric ribbon material 230 with the texture or appearance 240 simulating the texture or appearance of paper can be accomplished in several ways. For example, the polymeric ribbon material 230 having the matte or textured finish can be produced by printing a web of polymeric material with a matted (i.e. dull finish) ink, by lacquering at least one of the upper and lower surfaces 234 and 236 of

the sheet of polymeric material with a dull finish lacquer or a matting lacquer, by flocking the sheet of polymeric material, by application of a foamable lacquer or foamable ink to the sheet of polymeric material, by embossing the sheet of polymeric material to provide an embossed pattern simulating the texture or appearance of paper, or by embossing and printing the sheet of polymeric material to provide embossed and printed patterns wherein the embossed and printed patterns may be in registry, out of registry or wherein a portion of the embossed and printed patterns are in registry and a portion of the embossed and printed patterns are out of registry. In addition, a matte or textured finish capable of providing the sheet of polymeric material with the texture or appearance 240 simulating the texture or appearance of paper can be achieved by extruding a polymeric resin onto a matted or textured chill roll. Thereafter, the web of material having the texture or appearance 240 simulating the texture or appearance of paper can be cut in a conventional manner to provide the polymeric film 232.

[0103] Any polymeric film capable of being textured or otherwise modified to provide the polymeric material with the texture or appearance 240 simulating the texture or appearance of paper can be employed in the formulation of the polymeric ribbon material 230. For example, the polymeric material 232 employed to produce the polymeric ribbon material 210 can be polypropylene film having a thickness of from about 0.1 mil to about 30 mil,

and more desirably of from about 0.5 mil to about 10 mil, or an expanded core polymeric film having a thickness of from about 0.6 mil to about 10 mil.

[0104] Changes may be made in the construction and the operation of the various components, elements and assemblies described herein or in the steps or the sequence of steps of the methods described herein without departing from the spirit and scope of the invention as defined in the following claims.